Indigenous Garo Women's Role in Family Transformation in Bangladesh

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Abstract

The study aims to explore the roles of indigenous Garo women in transforming their families in Bangladesh. A quantitative approach applied to conduct the study while the social survey method was used to collect data and information. The study reveals that the socio-economic status of Garo women is very poor as 35% of them completed the primary level of education and 40% passed secondary level of education while 64% of Garo women are day laborers and 61% of are loan receivers. Conventional role-female headship has been changing overwhelmingly as both husband and wife are playing vibrant role in the family building where 80% of family decisions are being taken jointly. Though the traditional role of female headship is being changed, women have to perform 69% of household activities. The participation of them in local social organizations is impressive (74%) but they are reluctant to involve in local politics.

Keywords: *Indigenous Community; Garo Women; Family Transformation; Bangladesh; Female Headship*

Introduction

Indigenous peoples refer to those groups of people who are diverse from the social and cultural points of view and who share inherited links to the lands and natural wealth where they live (World Bank, 2021). In a statistic of Amnesty International (AI), it has been found that more than 370 million people are classified as indigenous in over 90 countries in the globe which denotes about 5% of the world's

population. As well, it has also been found that the majority of these indigenous i.e approximately 70% belong to Asia (Amnesty International, 2009). However, it is well known that indigenous peoples around the world are now facing several challenges including safe & secured shelter, food, cloth, basic education, health facilities, etc., yet, many of them have been able to adjust to these changes as well as challenges through the ongoing application of traditional knowledge, government assistance, donor/non-state organization assistance, and so on. As well, it is worth mentioning that distinct indigenous peoples are now contributing to mitigation and adaptation tactics along with using natural resources to ensure their preservation into the future. Particularly, they are now playing a praiseworthy role regarding protecting the environment from deforestation, protecting mineral, oil, and gas abstraction, ensuring viable production, and consumption structures, as well as ensuring operative stewardship over indigenous women, etc. (United Nations, 2021). In this regard, Reyes-García et al. (2019) articulate that indigenous people have an important part in restoration initiatives, such as sustaining traditional practices, repairing land that has been damaged by outsiders, piecing together outside organizations, working to restore ecosystems, and so on (Reyes-García et al., 2019).

However, there are more than 5,000 distinct indigenous peoples (Amnesty International, 2009) around the world where Garo[1] is the well-known matrilineal group (Majumdar, 1980). Particularly, in Bangladesh, they (Garo) are the major ethnic minorities (Muhammed et al., 2011a) among 54 estimated indigenous groups with unique identities (Burling, 1997). About 100,000 Garo people live in the distinct parts (especially the northern part) of the country where they are treated as *'Adibhasi'* people (Siddiqui et al., 2012). The Majority of the Garo people live in the north-eastern districts of Tangail, Jamalpur, Sherpur, Mymensingh, Netrakona, Sunamganj, Sylhet, and Gazipur with the highest presence in Haluaghat and Dhobaura Upazilas of Mymensingh, Durgapur and Kalmakanda Upazilas of Netrokona (Muhammed et al., 2011).

Garo ethnic minorities especially Garo women play a significant role to promote the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. Particularly, for the purpose of social development, they are contributing to improving new self-images, ideals, ambitions, along with the concepts of belonging and motion. Moreover, they play a praiseworthy role to sustain the different cultural events (Wangala, Jamang Sia, Mi Amua, etc.) (NIC, 2021) that interlink the Bengali culture as well as highlight the traditional identity of Bangladesh. As well, for promoting economic development, they are now playing a significant role in terms of producing more agricultural products along with up-to-date workforce i.e government job, NGO job, community health consultant, teaching, etc. (Akhter & Rahman, 2020). Garo women can adopt a dual role, doing household responsibilities while also working outside the home to supplement their income. However, there is no reason to suppose that women in the Garo community have equal rights to their male counterparts or that they may participate in the family decision-making process according to their own desires (Das, 2005). Although the constitution of Bangladesh include a special provision (through the 15th amendment) in 2011 to shield and develop the "unique local culture and tradition of the tribes, minor races, ethnic sects, and communities", indigenous people particularly Garo ethnic community is still facing several challenges (Ahmed, 2016). Predominantly, the major challenges of Garo people especially Garo women are lack of opportunities to entrance to conventional services (Ahmmed, 2012), sturdy loss of tribal land, negligence, segregation, poverty, violation of their rights, exploitation, etc. (ucanews, 1994). Therefore, this study explored how indigenous Garo women have been contributing to the transformation of their families and investigated their extent of socio-political engagement in the family well-being.

Literature Review

Indigenous peoples are offspring who practice separate traditions and ways of life from those of the dominant societies in which they reside (United Nations, 2020). It has already been worth mentioning

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[1] The major ethnic minorities in Bangladesh.

that in the world, more than 5000 indigenous people live from which the common instance is the Lakota in the USA, the Mayas in Guatemala, the Saami of northern Europe, the Maori of New Zealand, the Garo, and Chakma community in Bangladesh (Fitzmaurice, 2021).

In this context, a hill tribe known as the Garo lives on an extension of the Garo hill to the south in Bangladesh, at the mid-northern border with India (Dey & Sultana, 2009). However, this study examined the role of indigenous Garo women to the transformation of their families and the extent of their participation in socio-political process in Bangladesh at the root level. Therefore, related studies have been explained below to validate the contribution of indigenous people.

From a global point of view, Nelson (2019) conducts a study on the economic expansion, aptitude development, and generational sustainability of the indigenous people. In this regard, the author articulates that due to an uneven affiliation with the state, indigenous peoples have long been excluded from economic involvement. However, the study has been conducted based on the secondary data analysis where the findings of the study demonstrate that many first nations groups want to participate in the economy and break free from their reliance. As well, the author depicts the process of how indigenous people can enable long-lasting settlement and recognition (Nelson, 2019). Similarly, Du (2017) depicts a study on the progress of indigenous people through exploring the contribution of information and communications technologies (ICT). The author argues that for the development of the indigenous people around the globe, almost every year, a wide range of articles in this area are published. Particularly, the author conducts this study based on the secondary data analysis where the author highlights and analysis how many articles were published in a particular way and explains which types of methods were applied to illustrate the progress of the indigenous community. However, the author demonstrates several issues including indigenous cultural and knowledge preservation, indigenous literacy and education development, indigenous people's interactions with technologies, and the digital divide issues (Du, 2017).

From the native point of view, Hossain (2013) explores a study on the indigenous people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in terms of assessing their socio-economic status. Particularly, the author investigates the several factors that have an adverse effect on the indigenous people and create diverse socio-economic issues. The study was conducted based on the secondary data analysis where the findings of the study reveal that there are no vast occupation opportunities for the hill tracts people, even agricultural and cultivation activities are highly dependent on nature and primitive technologies (Hossain, 2013). Predominantly, Beg et al. (2020) illustrate a study on the lifestyle, family background, education level, and socioeconomic status of ethnic groups in Bangladesh. This study has been conducted based on a cross-sectional survey method where the findings of the study validate that minority groups could not organize themselves to reach their basic rights due to lack of education, extreme poverty, lack of proper healthy atmosphere, etc. In this regard, the authors suggest that the government and concerned authorities should take appropriate initiatives so that they can get enough facilities to survive meaningfully (Beg et al., 2020). As well, Akhter & Rahman (2020) conduct a study on assessing the changes in the lifestyles of the Garo ethnic community from the socio-economic perspective. The authors articulate that the Garo is the most prominent indigenous community in Bangladesh which has a unique ethnic identity. The study has been conducted based on the quantitative method where the authors mainly explore the socio-economic and cultural factors in terms of evaluating the current lifestyles status of the Garo community. The findings of the study demonstrate that current national strategies and legal parameters have an adverse effect on the rights and lifestyles of the Garo community in Bangladesh. As well, the authors explored the existing education status, income opportunities, and social status of the Garo people to know the prevailing condition of the Garo community in Bangladesh. Moreover, a number of challenges have been found in findings including poor education, unawareness, lack of social recognition and exploitation by the native people, etc. Therefore, the authors recommend that appropriate credentials and governmental acknowledgment can ensure the fundamental rights of the ethnic people in Bangladesh (Akhter & Rahman, 2020).

Correspondingly, Dey & Sultana (2009) argue that the Garo community has diverse socio-economic culture and history. Moreover, the authors articulate that Garo people belong to an isolated area in distinct parts of the country due to their origin and uniqueness. However, the study has been conducted based on the secondary data analysis where the findings of the study demonstrate the several challenges of the Garo community including an embargo on Jhum cultivation, deforestation, avoidance, inadequate resettlement opportunities, poor employment opportunities, etc. Conversely, the findings of the study also validate that due to the progress of transportation and communication, Garo communities have been significantly progressed (Dey & Sultana, 2009). Moreover, Sangma (2012) illustrates a study on the nature of social change in the Garo community from the British period to the present era. The study has been conducted based on the secondary data analysis where the findings of the study validate that there have been happening many changes in the Garo society including the spread of Christianity, the introduction of western education, transportation, modern health care, and the new agricultural techniques. These changes have a great impact on Garo's socio-economic, cultural, and political life. But the author articulates that these changes can not alter their traditional religion, basic of social customs and practices (Sangma, 2012).

In addition, Muhammed et al. (2011) demonstrate a study on the explanation of several socio-economic and cultural aspects of the Garo people regarding their livelihoods. The study has been conducted based on empirical analysis. The authors clarify that indigenous people are deprived of their human rights and face a number of socio-economic and political challenges to continue their unique culture and traditions. For example, conflict with the non-Garo population due to their illegal settlement, conflict with the forest department, etc. The authors recommend that the government should recognize the Garo population as indigenous people of the area and take effective forest policy to protect forest resources (Muhammed et al., 2011).

However, different authors have extensively written about indigenous people and the Garo community. Literature review validates that no particular study has been conducted yet to explore the role of indigenous Garo women in the transformation of their families in Bangladesh.

Research Objective

The primary purpose of the study was to explore how indigenous Garo women have been contributing to the transformation of their families in Bangladesh. Secondary objectives were-

a) To know the socio-demographic information of the indigenous Garo women in Bangladesh;
b) To explore the roles of Garo women in transforming their family;
c) To investigate the extent of their socio-political engagement.

Methods and Materials

Study Location

The study was conducted in Bhaluka Upazila, field administrative unit of a district, of Mymensingh district of Bangladesh, see figure-1. Seven Villages- Chandpur, Sonakhali, Dhankura, Panchgaon, Mollikabari, Naluakuri, and Pakhircha of three Union- Mollikabari, Hobirbari, and Dakatia Union of Bhaluka Upazila were selected as the area of the study. The research was conducted in the Garo community, one of the indigenous communities in Bangladesh. The location was selected purposively considering two reasons i.e one of our research team members belongs to the Garo community and Bhaluka Upazila, the residential area of the Garo people, is adjacent to the researchers' university.

The Approach of the Study

The quantitative approach was used as the study approach. This approach offers numeric or quantitative data and information, trends, opinions of the population by which researchers can generalize or can make claims about the study population (Creswell, 2009).

Research Method

A survey method was used as the research method; a social survey was conducted to collect required data and information. The survey method is the most popular method of data collection in social science research. It helps the researcher to get more reliable data and to reach the sample population directly. Additionally, it has an excellent vehicle of measurement (Aminuzzaman, 2011).

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Data has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected from the respondents directly while books, research articles, journals, news, opinion, websites, etc. were the sources of secondary data. A structured questionnaire was developed for primary data collection as well as face to face to interviews were conducted through using the structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was arranged to collect demographic information of the respondents to know the roles of the Garo women to transform their family.

Sampling

A probability sampling method was used in conducting the research; a random sampling technique was applied where every married Garo woman of Dakatia, Hobirbari, and Mollikabari Union had an equal chance to be the participants of the study. A total of 100 married Garo women were selected randomly from seven villages of the Dhakatia Union of Bhaluka Upazila for the interview in the study. As the project was based upon self-funding and collecting data from rural indigenous Garo women is a difficult task; the researchers determined 100 women to be the size of the sample of the research.

Data Analysis Plan

Collected data and information have been categorized according to nature. Data has been presented following the sequence of the objectives of the study. Simple statistical tools- table, bar chart, figure, diagram, etc. have been used. The findings of the study have been presented by dividing into three key parts- socio-demographic information of the respondents, roles of Garo women in the transformation of their family, and the extent of Garo women's socio-political engagement.

Ethical Consideration

Either oral or written consent is taken prior to data collection from each respondent during the period of data collection. A guarantee to keep privacy and confidentiality of their given information was given to each participant. Researchers assured the respondents that they will not face any harm by using their given information. Therefore, researchers complied with the social science research ethical guideline in every stage of the study.

Figure-1: Study Location in the Bangladesh Map. (Source: eviewbangla.blogspot.com)

Findings of the Study

This cross-sectional study has been conducted to serve the principal objective of the research. In this regard, the study was conducted in Bhaluka Upazila, a field administrative unit of Bangladesh, where the researchers collected required data and information through a social survey on 100 Garo Women to examine their contribution to transform their families.

Demographic Information of the Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Respondents (Source: Field Survey, December 2021)

Serial No.	Upazila (Administrative Unit)	Living Area		Age	Frequency
		Name of Union	Name of Village		
1	Bhaluka Upazila Parishad	Dakatia Union	Chandpur	24-55	39%
2			Sonakhali	24-55	5%
3			Dhankura	25-68	15%
4			Panchgaon	26-45	11%
5		Mollikbari Union	Mollikbari	30-50	10%
6		Hobir Bari Union	Naluakuri	23-55	16%
7			Pakhirchala	24-35	4%
Total					**100%**

The above table represents the socio-demographic information of the respondents. Since the study area was selected as Bhaluka Upazila Parishad under the Mymensingh division, data was collected from the three (3) Union Parishad and seven (7) villages under this Upazila Parishad. According to the above table, 39% of the respondents' age group were aged 24–55, whereas only 4% of the respondents belonged to the 24-35 age group. This statistic represents that the majority of the respondents were in their middle age.

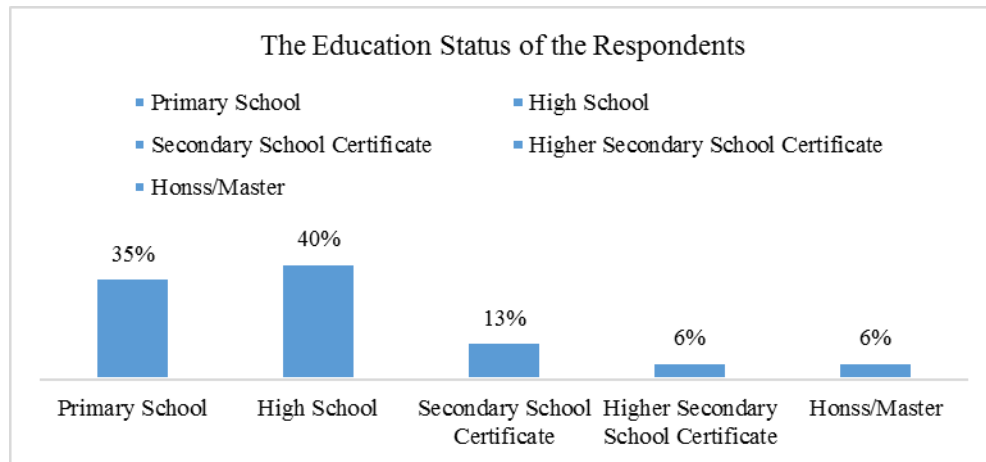### The Education Status of the Respondents

Figure 2: The Education Status of the Respondents (Source: Field Survey, December 2021)

According to the survey, only a small number of respondents (6%) were higher educated (Hon's/Masters), while the majority (40%) of respondents had completed their secondary education (SSC). As well, it has been found that 35% of respondents have completed their primary education. Therefore, the above bar chart illustrates that respondents have a minimum education level. In this context, the researchers think that the existing education level is not sufficient to ensure effective family contribution, active social attachment, sustainable socio-economic development, as well as effective empowerment of the women in the Garo community.

The Informant's Profession
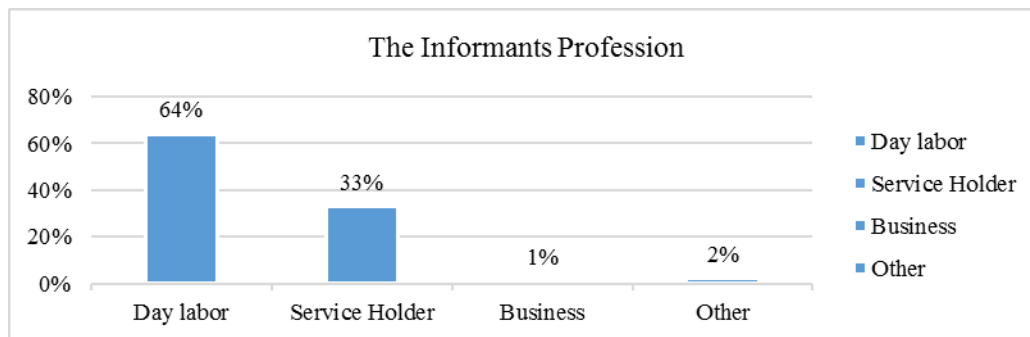
Figure 3: Profession of the Informants (Source: Field Survey, December 2021)

The above bar chart illustrates the profession of the respondents. Based on the survey, it has been found that two-thirds (64%) of respondents were in day labor and maidservant. This indicates the poor living standards along with the poor socio-economic status of the Garo women community, where only 33% of respondents were service holders. In this context, the researchers think that women in the Garo community are still struggling to survive and could not be fully empowered in the current society. The researchers added that if the Garo women had been more educated, they could have made noteworthy contributions to their family, community, and country.

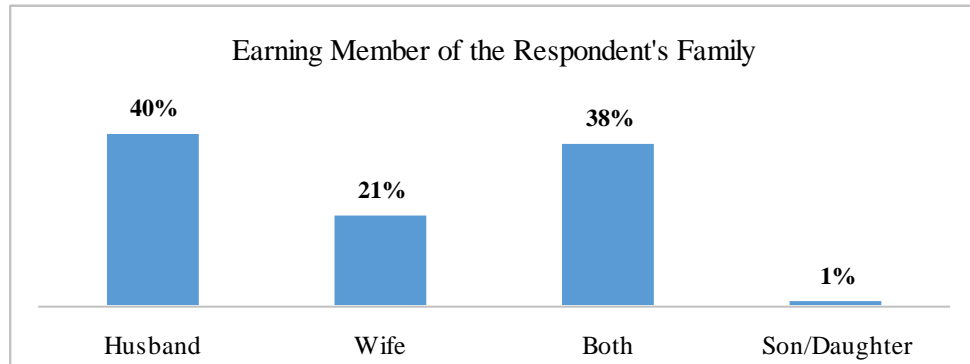**Earning Member of the Respondent's Family**

Figure 4: Earning Member of the Respondents' Family (Source: Field Survey, December 2021)

According to the survey, the above bar chart reveals the information of the earning members of the Garo community. The line chart demonstrates that 21% of women (wives) were the earning members of the Garo family, while 40% were husbands. It has also been detected that 38% of both wives and husbands of the Garo community were involved in different professions to contribute to the family. In this regard, as the earning members of the family, one-third of women's contributions demonstrate the nature of women's empowerment in the Garo community. However, the researchers articulate that although the Garo community originated based on maternal power, the socio-economic development of the Garo women could not be improved, especially compared to the general society. Therefore, the authors argue that concerned authorities should give special attention to the Garo community as well as Garo women's empowerment.

The Income Source of the Respondent's Family

Table 2: The Income Source of the Respondent's Family (Source: Field Survey, December 2021)

Particulars	Results
Agriculture	13%
Day labors	27%
Jobs (Wife/Husband/Son/Daughter)	54%
Business	3%
Others	3%
Total	100%

The above table validates the income source of the respondents' families. According to the survey, it has been observed that 13% of respondents were involved in agricultural activities to manage their income source, while 27% of the respondents were involved in day labor activities. Since a large number of respondents lived in industrial areas (garment industry), 54% of respondents were involved in ready-made garment jobs to earn money. However, the socio-economic condition of the respondents was poor despite living in an industrial area. Moreover, the findings imply that since the Garo people in Bangladesh are comparatively less than the general population, they are struggling to adjust to the suitable employment that they prefer. It has also been observed that the majority of Garo people, particularly women from urban areas, work in low-wage jobs, preferably as garment workers.

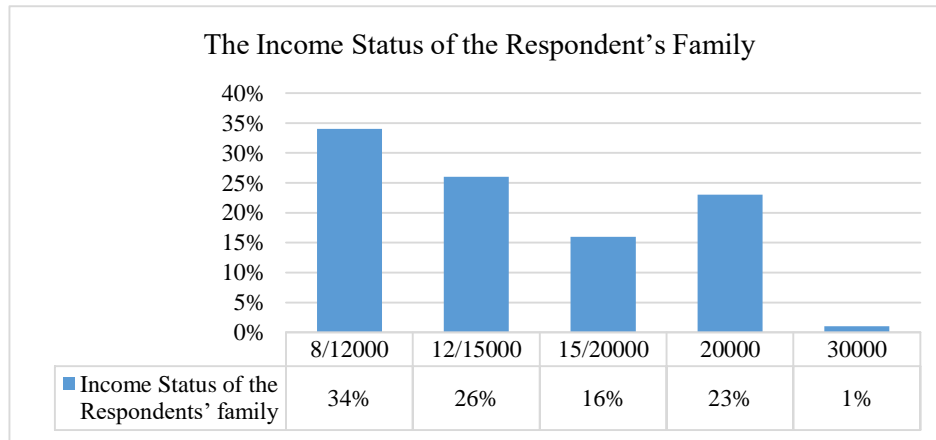**The Income Status of the Respondent's Family**

Figure 5: The Income Status of the Respondent's Family (Source: Field Survey, December 2021)

The above bar chart represents the income status of the respondents' families. According to the survey, the monthly income status of the Garo family was very poor, which hampered their (Garo community people's) living standards. The bar chart also illustrates that only 1% of Garo families' monthly income was more than BDT 30,000, while the majority of families' (34%) monthly income was around BDT 8000–12,000. However, despite the Garo community's improving social conditions regarding gender equality, education, and cultural affairs, they are still struggling to improve their economic conditions. In this regard, the findings of the study imply that a large number of Garo families (around 42%) belong to the lower-middle-class, which demonstrates their real economic status in the general society. As a result, the findings show that the Garo community's socioeconomic status is marginal due to inadequate education, low-category jobs, limited working opportunities, and high labor dependency.
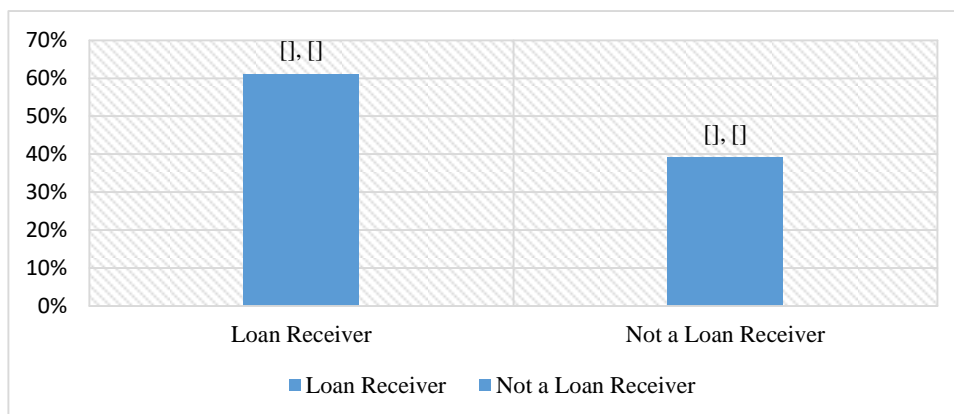
Respondents' Economic Dependency

Figure 6: Respondents' Economic Dependency (Source: Field Survey, December 2021)

In the context of this study, based on the survey, it has been found that the majority of the respondents (61%) were loan receivers. The main reason behind this issue is the poor socio-economic conditions of the respondents. According to the given statistics, the majority of Garo people are dependent on the donations of bi-lateral or multi-lateral organizations (NGOs/INGOs) and seek financial aid to manage their daily affairs. Since the Garo people are a small ethnic group in Bangladesh, it is very challenging to find the appropriate employment opportunities compared to the general population.

Moreover, their socio-economic status, education status, skills status, and social engagement with several development activities are very limited. That's why many humanitarian organizations, volunteer groups, and national and international NGOs are now working to improve their socio-economic conditions. So, the results show that many Garo women depend on the donor agency for their economic well-being.
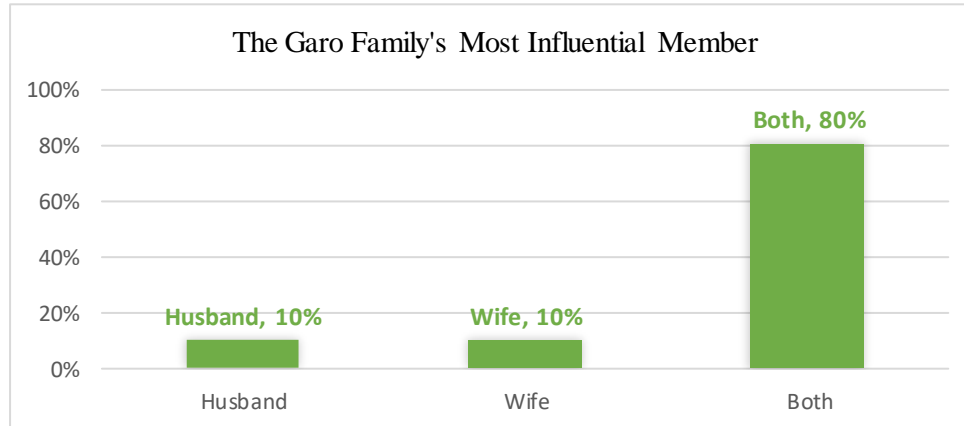
The Garo Family's Most Influential Member

Figure 7: The Garo Family's Most Influential Member (Source: Field Survey, December 2021)

The above figure depicts the dominating role of the Garo people in their family. According to the investigation, it has been found that both males and females, i.e., 80%, were the most dominating members of the Garo family. In this regard, it has also been practical that males (10%) and females (10%) have an equal dominating role in the Garo family. The findings imply that although the women lead the Garo family based on their culture regarding solving family issues and decision-making, this trend has now been reversed, i.e., women's dominating roles have been changed so that both males and females get equal rights to take family decisions. The authors observed that since the Garo community has moved out of various prejudices of their traditional culture and adopted the modern social system, they have understood the importance of gender equity (equal rights of men and women) in society. The findings infer that now both females and males in Garo communities have equal rights to prepare any decisions regarding solving family issues that have a significant positive impact on the development of Garo communities.
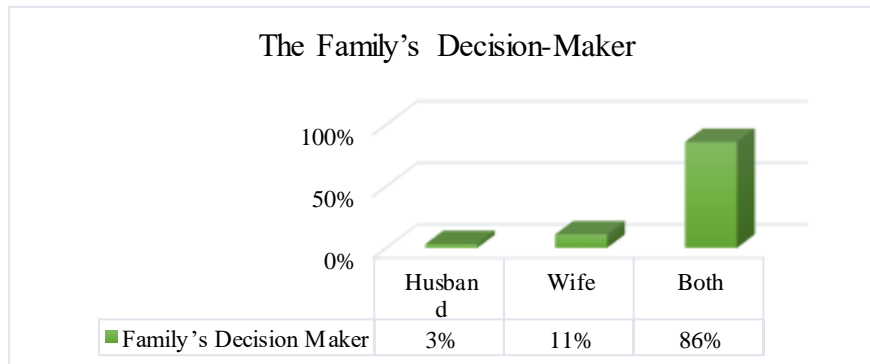
The Family's Decision-Maker

Figure 8: The Family's Decision-Maker (Source: Field Survey, December 2021)

This is the most important factor in every society. However, according to the study, 80% of respondents (both men and women) take collective decisions regarding family issues. As well, it has also been experiential that 11% of women (wives) can make family decisions except for males. Such findings

of the study support the previous findings (most dominating member in the Garo family), where the authors elucidate that the Garo community has improved their conventional thinking to cope with modern society as well as develop their socio-economic conditions. But it has also been observed that, in some cases, women take family decisions in the Garo community since they belong to a maternal society.
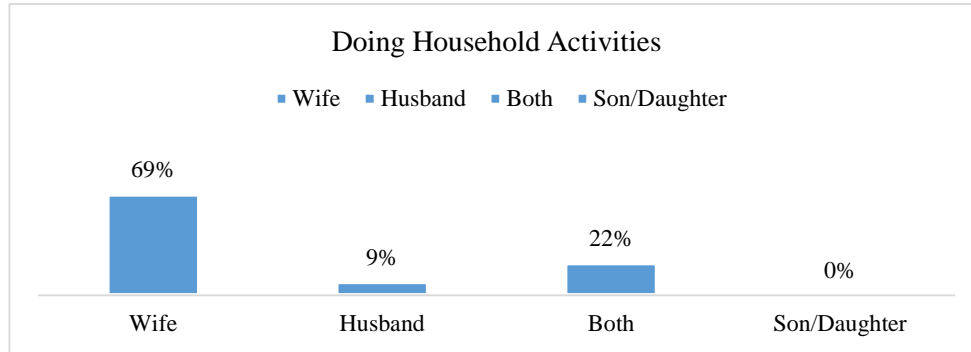
Managing Household Activities

Figure 9: Garo Women's Share in Household Activities (Source: Field Survey, December 2021)

The above bar chart represents that 69% of Garo women were looking after their household activities, while males' contributions were very minor, i.e. 9%. As well, it has been found that, surprisingly, no sons or daughters were involved in the household activities. Conversely, both 22% of males and females (husband and wife) were involved in the household activities in terms of collaboration. However, the findings of the study imply that for doing/looking after household activities, the Garo community largely depends on the female members of their family. In this regard, the authors observed that since the Garo community follows the maternal social approach and is headed by the role of women traditionally, they look after all family issues. But there is a misconception among the general population (who do not belong to the Garo community) that Garo women head the family alone and they work outside of the family where the male members take care of the household affairs. But the findings demonstrate that nowadays, even men share their opinions and participate in the family's decision-making. Moreover, the findings indicate that the Garo people make cooperative decisions based on the collaboration between males and females.

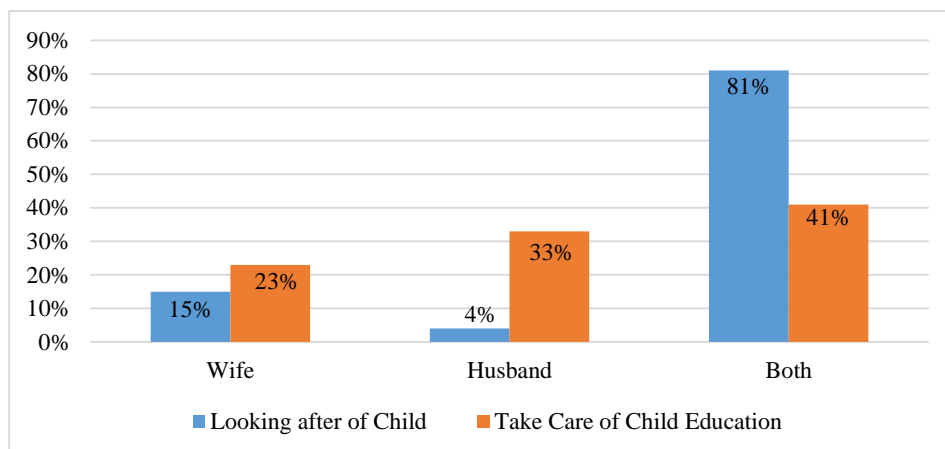**Contribution to the Care of Children and Their Education**

Figure 10: Contribution to the care of children and their education (Source: Field Survey, December 2021)

The above bar chart demonstrates the responsibility of a husband and wife in a Garo family in terms of looking after their children and children's education. According to the survey, the bar charts

show that only 4% of fathers were looking after their children, but 33% of fathers were highly concerned with their children's education. Besides, 15% of women look after their children, but 23% of women are concerned with their children's education. In contrast, 81% of husband and wife jointly care for their children, while 41% of them (husband and wife) jointly care for their children's education.

The above statistic implies that in the Garo community, although male members (husbands) play a small role regarding taking care of children, male members play a much bigger role than female members (wives) in terms of children's education in the Garo community. The findings also determine that in the Garo family, male members are highly concerned with their children's education due to changing socio-economic status. The statistics reveal that in terms of caring for children, both husband and wife together play a noteworthy role in the Garo family.

Garo Women's Participation in Different Organizations

The given bar chart demonstrates that 72% of Garo women participated in different organizations and programs, including micro-credit programs of BRAC (the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), ASA (Association for Social Advancement), Grameen Bank, etc. under the non-government organizations (NGOs) programs. Garo women also took part in Community Based Organization (CBO) programs, which helped them gain more power and improve their social and economic lives in many ways.
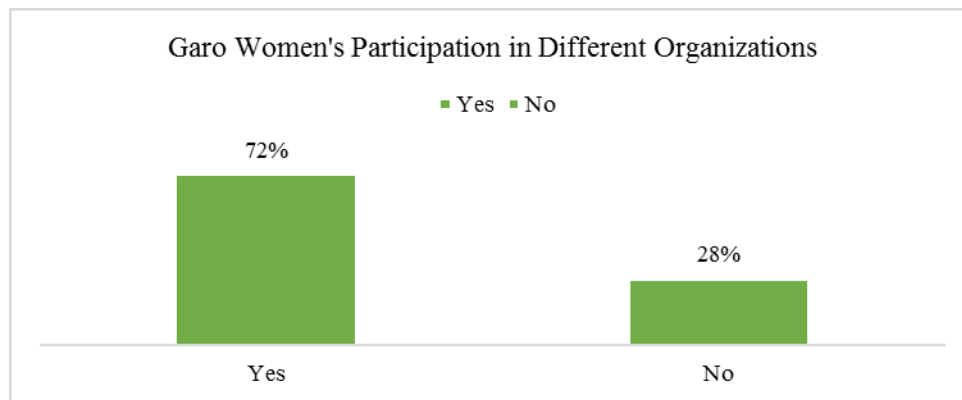

Figure 11: Garo Women's Participation in Different Organizations (Source: Field Survey, December 2021)

The above results show that most Garo people, especially women, take part in CBO (Community-based Organizations), NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), and INGOs-based (International Non-Governmental Organizations) development programs. This is because the Garo are an ethnic group in Bangladesh and receive many donations from local and international NGOs. In this way, the authors contemplate that Garo women take part in a lot of community-based and development programs, but they don't get involved in local politics because they have an identity crisis and are worried about being a minority.

The Extent of Participation in Local Politics

The following bar chart proves that there were no respondents (Garo women) who participated in the local/central elections. It has been found that ethnic people, especially the Garo community in Bangladesh, feel insecure in terms of political participation. Moreover, they do not get enough support from the political parties.
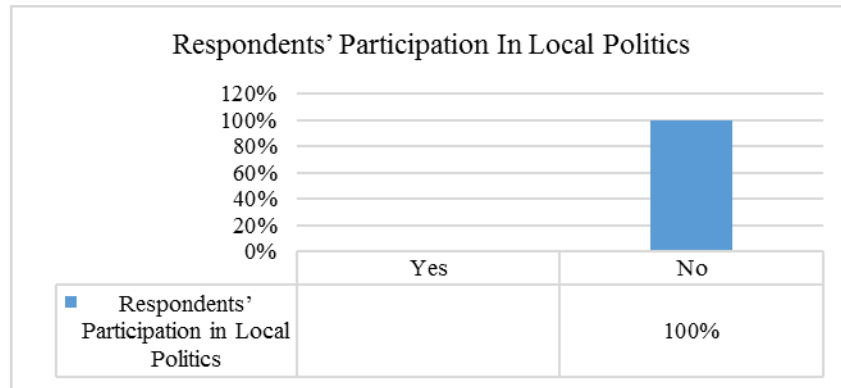
Figure 12: The Extent of Participation in Local Politics (Source: Field Survey, December 2021)

In this context, it has also been observed that ethnic people don't get solutions to minor issues through political support. Therefore, the Garo people do not show an interest in taking part in political affairs. In this perspective, such findings infer that Garo people, especially women, are highly interested in participating in development programs, but due to uncertainty, risks, and their social status (minority), they (Garo women) do not participate in politics. Therefore, the authors perceive that there is no political participation of the Garo people in Bangladesh, which largely hampers their empowerment and socio-economic development.
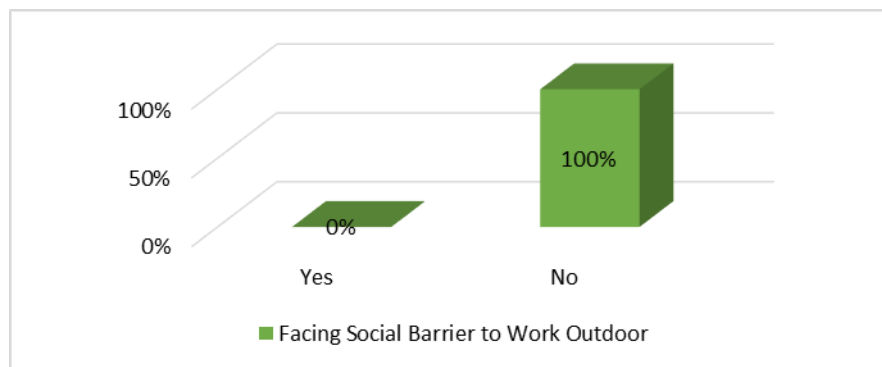
Facing Social Barriers to Working Outdoor

Figure 13: Extent of Facing Social Barriers to Working Outdoor (Source: Field Survey, December 2021)

According to the survey, it has been found that there were no social barriers for Garo women in terms of working outside on behalf of their family's consent. The statistics demonstrate that the Garo community stimulates women's empowerment through various means, and there is no social barrier among the Garo communities regarding outdoor work.

Conversely, from the general and social point of view, it has also been observed that the Garo community faces several social issues imposed by the general society, including race discrimination, religious issues, nationality issues, employment issues, and political issues due to being an ethnic group. Although the government of Bangladesh is highly concerned about the development of the minority group, ethnic groups, or other backward sections, ethnic people, especially the Garo community, face several challenges from the indigenous society and ordinary surroundings. Therefore, ethnic people, especially the Garo community in Bangladesh, should get special attention from the concerned authorities to address their existing social barriers regarding improving their socio-economic status as well as empowerment.

Discussion

The study explored the nature of the Garo family, their contribution to family management, and their social-political engagement in society. The findings of the study validated that Garo women play a noteworthy role in their family building and family management, including child care and income generation. Although the Garo people are the ethnically and socially backward section of Bangladesh, most of the Garo women are now coming forward to participate in various development programs for their social development. Jalil and Oakkas (2012) articulate that the family pattern of the Garo community is matriarchal and since the Garo families somehow live together with Bengali families, the Garo people are influenced by the Bengali family structure (Jalil & Oakkas, 2012). The findings of the study also implied that earlier, although the women's status was higher in the Garo family than the men's, and the decision-making power in the Garo family rested on the female members (since they lived in a matriarchal society), at present, both male and female members have equal rights and are participating in the decision-making process. In this regard, Jalil (2012) supported the findings that in modern society, the Garo female head does not have the authority to make any decisions alone in the family (Jalil & Oakkas, 2012). Besides, another finding of the study implied that in terms of childcare and taking care of children's education, both male and female members are now playing a gigantic role, whereas in the past, most of the family responsibility rested with the women. Sarker & Ghani (2008) supported this finding and elucidated that Garo family members (both male and female) are highly concerned about taking good care of their infants and children (Sarker & Ghani, 2009). In addition, the study explored the socio-political engagement of the *Garo* women in the community. The study has been exemplified that most of the *Garo* women are involved in several Community Based Organization (CBO) programs i.e NGOs, or INGO programs for their economic dependency. This finding indicates that Garo women are closely engaged with their social development programs through their active engagement and they have no social barriers. Akhter & Rahman (2020) articulate that with a view to supporting the socio-development programs, ethnic people's participation has already drawn the special attention of the government as well as the foreign donor agencies. Conversely, Akhter & Rahman illustrate the major drawback of the ethnic people especially, the Garo people's participation in the social development programs in terms of the cultural diversity between the Garo community and general people. The authors argue that due to different norms, values, customs, beliefs, and traditions, Garo women face several barriers in terms of their social involvement in the development programs (Akhter & Rahman, 2020). Correspondingly, the findings of the study also revealed that there is no political participation of Garo women in their community. This finding infers that since the Garo people are the minor ethnic group in Bangladesh, and since they do not get any political benefits, Garo women are not interested in political participation. In this regard, the International Republican Institute (IRI) supports the study findings. IRI (2020) validates that ethnic people, especially the Garo people, do not get enough support from ethnic communities' politicians, political parties, and local government officials. Moreover, the elected representatives do not ensure their political commitment after the election. That's why most ethnic people, especially the Garo people in Bangladesh, are not interested in participating in local and regional politics (IRI, 2020).

Therefore, from the overall discussion, it can be said that in the 21st century, the socio-economic status of the Garo community has changed and improved. Today, in most cases, both male and female members of the Garo family exercise equal rights and they take collective decisions regarding family affairs. Besides, most of the Garo people have been highly influenced by the general social structure (patriarchal social structure). As a consequence, the Garo women do not have the sole authority to make any decisions in the family. Conversely, since the Garo community still practices a matriarchal social structure, most of the Garo women lead the family from the front, and they take part in the various social development programs. Moreover, Garo women are closely engaged with the donor agencies (bilateral and multilateral) for their economic dependency, which states that Garo people are still struggling to get adequate employment opportunities and standard living opportunities. Additionally, the Garo people do not have any political participation in terms of enjoying their political rights. Because, most of the Garo people think that due to being the minority, they would not get any political support from the political

representatives. Therefore, the authors suggest that the concerned authorities should come forward to eliminate the existing challenges of the Garo community and ensure the socio-political participation of the Garo people in promoting the social and cultural development of Bangladesh.

Conclusion

Though Bangladesh has made tremendous progress in various socio-economic indicators of development in recent decades, the socio-economic condition of the indigenous community remains a long way behind the mainstream population. Traditional role in the indigenous Garo community—female headship is changing while her male counterpart's role in family affairs is also increasing. In particular, decisions related to family matters are now being taken by both husband and wife jointly. Mainstream Bengali culture and government development strategies might have an influence on re-shaping the traditional relationship structure in the Garo community. Therefore, Garo women are still bearing a large portion of the burdens ranging from family household activities to the management of social affairs towards the transformation of their family. Significantly, the Garo community is hesitant to participate in local politics, but they are active in various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and Garo women are active in various social organizations at the local level. A number of government interventions are highly needed to lift up the socio-economic conditions of the Garo community, such as: special safety net programs to increase the likelihood of getting education and employment opportunities at the local level, policy support to create awareness and to enhance political participation in the local sphere; and providing training with financial support towards the males of this community.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The authors are declaring that there is no conflict of interest regarding this study, authorship, and publication of this article.

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